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ABSTRACT

Parent participation as a requirement of Title I programs is examined in this report. The extent and degree to which this participation is effectively implemented in 116 schools in eight states is described. Data from Federal, State and local officials and from Title I parents were used to determine what problems mandated parent involvement might cause in compensatory education programs. An effort was made to find programs, practices and strategies that could serve as examples of successful parent participation. Several changes in practice and policy on the Federal, State and local levels are suggested for improving present levels of parent involvement in Title I programs. Areas for future research are also outlined. (Author/GC)

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Parent Involvement in Compensatory Education Programs: Problems and Potential Strategies Across 32 School Districts

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Parent Involvement in Compensatory Education Programs: Problems and Potential Strategies Across 32 School Districts

by
Bernard A. Kaplan and Pascal D. Forgione, Jr.*

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on the extent and the degree to which parent involvement, as a requirement of ESEA, Title I, is being effectively implemented as perceived by federal, state and local officials and Title I parents and to propose several suggestions for improvement in current practice.

The research questions we shall address in this paper are the following:

(1) What problems emerge in a compensatory education program that mandate parent involvement, such as ESEA, Title I?

(2) Are there effective and successful programs, practices and strategies that serve as promising examples with respect to the issue of parent participation?

Two additional questions are also posed:

(3) What changes in present practice and policy on the federal, state and local level should be made to improve present levels of parent participation, as an area specified under ESEA, Title I?

(4) What are some areas for further research pertaining to this topic?

This paper has been organized into five sections, as follows: A. Background; B. Problems in Parent Participations; C. Some Exemplary Practices; D. Proposed Changes in Policy and Practice; and E. Areas for Future Research.

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A. Background

During school year 1976-77 the Syracuse Research Corporation (SRC) initiated a comparative case study of the Federal compensatory Education program focusing on Federal-state-local relationships. This policy investigation involved eight state departments of education and thirty-two school districts and was reported to the National Institute of Education in November, 1977. A major component of each of the forty individual case studies was the issue of Parent Involvement. (The ESEA, Title I legislation requires that Parent Advisory Councils be established at both the school district and individual school levels.)

Parents, professional educators and community representatives were interviewed at the school and district levels, and the issue of parent involvement in compensatory education programs was also examined in interviews with state and federal compensatory education program administrators.

The importance of the issue of parent involvement in public education has been a matter of increased concern since the mid-1960s when the Federal Government's war on poverty legislation placed great emphasis on this component. However, the lack of systematic evaluation of such efforts over the years and their impact on educational systems and program reforms underscores need for greater research attention to this topic. In a paper presented at the 1977 AERA Annual meeting, Michael Kirst pointed out that:

> Unfortunately, there is currently little empirical evidence to suggest which models of parent participation are likely to prove most effective in which types of institutional settings, nor what types of implementation strategies would promote their use. The time is ripe for comparative research that seeks to identify what works and what does not.*

The answers to the aforementioned questions have been drawn in large measure from SRC's one-year comparative case study of the administration of ESEA, Title I programs which has been conducted under the auspices of the National Institute of Education. This policy investigation utilized an elite interviewing/data collection technique as part of a series of

*Michael W. Kirst, "Policy Implications for Educational Reform: Federal Experimental Schools and California's Early Childhood Education," Paper prepared for the 1977 Annual meeting of the American Education Research Association. A revised version to appear in Neal Gross and Robert Herriot, Dynamics of Planned Educational Change.

case studies which were designed to include eight SEAs, thirty-two LEAs (four in each state) and 116 participating Title I schools. The interviews were supplemented by careful review and analysis of documents and available data sources at the various levels. Parent involvement was one of eight compensatory education issues that were probed in the SRC study. Case study participants (totaling approximately 1,100 interviewees, including over 170 Title I parents) were carefully selected by the individual case study research teams at each level (federal, state, district and school building).*

B. Problems in Parent Participation Under ESEA, Title I

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the ESEA, Title I legislation requires that Parent Advisory Councils be established at both the school district and individual school levels. The regulations further stipulate that at least 51% of the PAC membership be comprised of Title I parents. Further, the purpose of the PACs are to advise on the nature of the local Title I programs and the manner in which these are administered. This includes inputs or reactions to such administrative areas as the Title I application (to the State Department of Education), the design of the needs assessment and program development components, and the provision for a review of the results of the annual program evaluation. Implicit in these functions are opportunities for the PACs to offer advice on district or school policy pertaining to other key Title I administrative operations bearing on, for example, school selection, student selection, concentration of effort, and resource allocations to the schools. Local officials are also supposed to furnish these parents with accurate information pertaining to the federal rules and regulations relative to the Title I program.

At the state level, for the eight states included, our study found little effort in this area generally, even among states that have taken some fairly directive stands in other Title I program areas. With the possible exception of one state, we did not see a major thrust geared toward making parents an integral part of the local Title I administrative process. Rather we saw most states restricting their activities to meeting what they perceive to be minimum federal requirements.

*The authors wish to acknowledge their indebtness to their SRC colleagues who shared authorship for the eight case study volumes and the final synthesis report from which sources the material for this paper is drawn.

Many states, it appears have considered the requirement met when they have disseminated the information regarding the necessity for district and school level PACs plus the regulations concerning parental involvement, and when the existence of PACs is confirmed through the application document and in monitoring visits. One state, for example, recently expanded its checklist in district monitoring to include a series of detailed but superficial questions involving local parent involvement activity. In another state, a strong emphasis was placed on a State Advisory Council (not required under federal regulations) and parents from the district PACs were urged to participate in sessions of this Council. However, there was no concurrent thrust by the state in the area of district and school level PACs.

In a third state, we found parent involvement policies that were somewhat more prescriptive than in the other states visited. This state mandates Advisory Councils for all schools with compensatory education (not just Title I) programs. In addition, school level applications require a rather comprehensive detailing of the nature of parental involvement at the school level. This area is also a specific focus of the state's monitoring visits. One problem with this state's approach, however, is that the multi-purpose nature of district and school level Advisory Councils sometimes dilutes the impact of specific Title I interests and concerns. This problem is further exacerbated by the state's requirement that these councils also include representatives from community social service agencies, the business community and the non-public schools*; aides; teachers; and administrators.

At the local level. The quality and quantity of parent participation in decision-making about Title I programs varies more among the 32 LEAs and 116 schools visited than any of the seven other Title I component areas we included in this study. Parent participation seems to fall into three broad categories at the LEA and school levels:

- Strong commitment by educators to parent involvement, often predating the federal school-level requirements, and parent councils have considerable, sometimes dominating influence.

- Administrator commitment to district-level parent council, but building-level commitment and participation varies markedly.

*At the district level.

- Real parent participation is minimal or nonexistent because (1) relatively committed educators have been unsuccessful in getting parents involved, or (2) educators are not committed and, instead, block or frustrate parent involvement.

Though we found parent participation in LEAs in three of the states to be somewhat more extensive than in the other five states, even there, SEA policy seems to be much less of an important factor than local district factors--preimarily the commitment of administrators and teachers both in terms of time and willingness to share power.

Our discussion addresses the characteristics and problems of parent participation observed in the LEAs and schools in this study and includes:

(a) Problems of educator apathy and lack of commitment,

(b) Membership and recruitment problems,

(c) Training of PAC members, and

(d) Patterns of role and function of PACs.

B.1 Education Apathy and Lack of Commitment to Parent Participation

In many of the 32 LEAs, central office administrators and building principals alike shared an attitude of coolness or reserve to the parental involvement requirement. Often building-level PACs had only been recently created; LEAs had waited until it was clear that regulations implementing the 1974 Amendments would take effect in the 1976-77 school year. Just as often, building PACs were likely to be "paper" organizations. Frequently, parent advisory committees were organized to fulfill the bare requirements of the Title I program and only that.

- In one district, a principal noted that building level PACs do not receive high priority, and stated that "I can't fool around with six or seven parents." Another principal in the same district argued that "There is no way in hell that they (PACs) can give input to building principals on how to educate children."

- In another state, a central office administrator commented on parent involvement: "If the role of parent involvement is for us to share with parents a description of the program and get their input as to how the community reacts to it, what they see as the prime needs, then fine. We are not going to have parents advise us on the way in which we will meet those needs." He went on to say, "Parents from the lowest income group and with the most disadvantaged children are not going to serve in parent groups, and I do not see how these uneducated individuals could in any way help."

- In one small, rural district where we found no evidence of a viable, organized PAC, there was only one PAC parent we could interview; she was an "acting" PAC chairperson and was not knowledgeable about the Title I program; she had been appointed by the principal, and did not have children in the Title I program. She had been chairperson for only two weeks. However, we found she was interested in getting more information about Title I.

- One principal indicated that "if the Board of Education wants parents to have more advisory power, they better redefine the principal's job."

School and district officials in these districts seem to reflect two types of negative attitudes toward this provision, namely:

(1) educators know best how to design or conduct an educational program; and/or

(2) parents would "take over" the operation if they got their collective foot in the door.

(There were some notable exceptions to the above behavior, primarily in the large metropolitan districts where district or area level advisory councils were well-organized, active, and supported by district officials and boards of education.)

B.2 Membership and Recruitment

There is considerable variation in the composition of Parent Advisory Councils and in how membership is attained. While the 51 percent rule is widely known and referred to, there are many PACs where voting and decisions take place without regard to this requirement. School officials tend to dominate or otherwise influence the choice of members or PAC decisions. Especially at the building level, Title I parents who serve on PACs are most typically involved as a result of having been sought out, nominated and/or appointed by a principal or some other staff member. Rarely was there any evidence of a procedure whereby parents choose themselves or other parents to organize, participate in, or guide building-level PACs.

- Member eligibility: In one district, parents who are school employees (generally school aides) are not permitted to be members of school-level or district PACs. In other LEAs, these parents are allowed to become members but they are not permitted to vote or to hold office. In still other districts, no distinction is made between parents who are

and parents who are not employees of the school system. In districts where PAC parents may be employees, there is, of course, a concern over whether their decisions are to protect their own employment situations or to support the Title I program, and, also, whether they are totally free of administrator influence. In districts where parent-employees of the LEA cannot serve as PAC members, there has been some concern (and suggestion) that strong parent leaders have been co-opted by the district through job offers, as for example was the case in one of the larger school districts in our study.

Coordination with other parent committees: Often PACs are asked to do "double-duty," i.e., to advise on more than Title I programs. Sometimes this takes the form of PACs being appendages of on-going organizations, such as PTAs, citizen advisory councils or in the case of districts in one of the states, state mandated school advisory councils. In one district in that state, we observed one very effective school-level PAC. Unfortunately, the interests served by that PAC were not primarily those of the Title I eligible population.

Attendance at PAC Meetings: Desegregation has become a special problem with respect to parent participation. In two districts that implemented busing for desegregation programs during recent school years, parent participation declined, particularly in PACs with marginal participation. Established parent groups became fragmented, or the "new" Title I schools were too remote from the residences of the parents for them to attend without great inconvenience.

Continuity and Cliques: Another problem area cited for meeting parent involvement objectives is "continuity of participation." In one state's SEA survey of LEAs, this ranked as one of the most important concerns among parents and administrators queried. In at least two districts, both big cities, there have been moves to permit parents who have made significant leadership contributions to Title I to continue in elitist-type roles at the district PAC level. In one of these, this includes retaining parents whose children are no longer participating in Title I programs. In these two districts, such moves have been highly criticized by the other out-ranked, less powerful, and less vocal parent members, but thus far they have been unable to effectively counter the entrenched groups. In both cases, this situation has been allowed to develop, and in fact has been encouraged, by local administrators.

In two other districts, PACs at the sub-district level are also active in the decision process, but in both these LEAs, the district-wide PAC exerts greater influence over local programming than do the subdistrict units. One of the consequences of the "filtering up" process by which a parent can move from building-level participation to membership on a subdistrict PAC to the LEA-wide council is the development of an elite group of Title I parents strongly committed to their area

constituency, but not necessarily receptive to the concerns of other areas of the city. This situation has created considerable tension in one of the large metropolitan districts, where the district-wide council is dominated by experienced and politically sophisticated blacks from the predominantly black area of the city, while a growing Hispanic and low-income white population is virtually left out of the Title I decision process.

B.3 Training of PAC Members

In the typical LEA there is an extremely low level of information communication to parents by either the LEAs or the SEAs with respect to Title I programs and potential roles of PACs. Title I regulations or other illustrative or explanatory materials are often not disseminated. And sometimes when materials are disseminated, the language is unintelligible to laypersons. School and district officials, regardless of whether they manifest positive or negative attitudes toward this requirement, are often at a loss as to how to provide effective technical assistance to improve parental involvement in Title I programs and the functioning of PACs. Rarely is training for parents provided or their attendance at state or national conferences encouraged or supported.

- In one district, a lack of parent training activities for PAC members had become a major point of dissention. A community representative in this district, one who attends most district advisory council meetings, told our interviewer that the district budgets money for parent training activities, but never releases it. A group of parents requested to attend a compensatory education meeting in the state capital this year but was turned down by the Board of Education; this resulted in parents "going back to the old practice of selling quilts..." Indeed, at one school we visited, the school PAC budget ($400) had been raised through bake sales, bazaars, and rummage sales.

- One knowledgeable interviewee at the local level observed that school agencies do an ineffective job in the area of information dissemination and parent training:

  "School districts use one of two strategies: They either overwhelm parents (with material and/or training), or they don't do anything. For example, some school districts provide parents with verbatim copies of small print federal regulations (which can easily overwhelm non-lawyers) in order to satisfy a "having access" regulation. However, this is not helpful..."

In one large urban school district, we came across one parent who represented a small minority of fairly well-informed, assertive parents. She registered a good deal of anger and a string of compliants that bear repeating:

"Our main problem is ignorance." She had to persist and circumvent normal channels before finally getting a copy of federal regulations (from a federal official). The copy she carried about was the most dog-eared, marked up copy we had encountered in our travels. She explained a long struggle to understand the meaning of what was printed therein. She complained that it was like a foreign language to her and other parents. She had asked district officials to review the regulations with parents, but this had not been done. The parent handbooks circulated by the district neither stated nor explained the regulations. Furthermore, parents were not sure, and found it almost impossible to find out, who (federal, state or local officials) made which decision. ...she also wanted to know how parents could become part of the process of review of proposed regulations. On inquiry, she had been told to look these things up in the Federal Register. She could not find anyone who had copies. She planned on continuing the search but felt other parents would not go to that amount of trouble. Even if they did, she said, most parents would find the language unintelligible. She recommended that federal officials try to find a more realistic means for collecting the comments of concerned parents.

A current Board of Education member in one district in our study was a former district-wide PAC member and Chairperson. Relying heavily on information acquired at parent in-service conferences in Washington, D.C., and in a nearby district in another state, she attempted to generate more parent participation and more substantive input into district-wide decisions. These attempts were generally unsuccessful... A new PAC chairperson (elected on the resignation of this woman) went through the entire year having no idea of what his role should be. This chairperson was totally unfamiliar with Title I regulations. His duties consisted merely of turning over the meeting to the Title I Director who, in turn, disseminated information about the Title I program. The PAC role, supposedly, was to listen and learn about the Title I program in that district. At no time, apparently, did the Title I Director actively solicit substantive parental input. The PAC Chairperson felt bitter over this experience--that the "chairperson" title was empty of meaning and had proven to be an embarassment to him; he indicated that he would never take such a position again.

PACs at the school level in one district appeared to be woefully inadequate or non-existent. Interviews with local PAC members indicated that where PACs existed and met with any frequency at all, it occurred in conjunction with the PTA and there was little substantive knowledge of or activity in the Title I program. The PAC members interviewed exhibited either ambivalence and deference to school staff, or frustration at the lack of interest on the part of other Title I parents.

B.4 Pattern of Role and Function of PACs

Where educators had made at least minimal commitment to parent participation in Title I, three role patterns emerged:

(1) PACs should support school officials and Title I program operations.

PAC members can help other parents to understand the need for this support and, through volunteers and other means, demonstrate their backing of current and proposed efforts. Several of the case studies indicated the "rubber stamp" quality that pervades parental involvement activity in these districts.

- The ongoing nature of compensatory education programs in one large urban district, in itself, was seen as contributing to a lack of interest according to some parents. Since staff continue from one year to the next, and since the focus is on reading and math and there is little likelihood or even need for major change, some parents do not see an important role for them to play. "What more can we do other than approve the budget?" one parent noted, though she was a parent who also stated her approval of the existing program and her trust in the principal and teachers.

(2) PACs should be the vehicle for improving parents' capability as parents.

In these settings, PACs are expected to provide parent-education activities to facilitate understanding of school and Title I programs and the acquisition of special skills to help their children overcome learning problems.

- In a small, rural district with a large proportion of recently-arrived Chicano families, our interviews revealed that the major thrust of parent involvement is to educate parents about how schools operate so that they can be more supportive of their children in the home environment. Most of the concerns that the parents bring to PAC discussions have to do with such "down-to-earth" matters as crowded school busses, poor cafeteria food, lice in the children's hair, and similar topics. Most of these parents have not attended school for very long themselves and cannot speak Engligh or read or write. The PAC coordinator, a Chicano, stated that it is not realistic to expect parents to monitor or make substantive input into the decision-making pertaining to the district's Title I program. He views parental involvement in the district as an educational outreach effort, attempting in the short run to raise the

parent's level of awareness of and support for their children's education. He feels that in the long run these parents will be able to make substantive contributions to Title I.

(3) PACs should involve parents in Title I planning, budgetary review, needs assessment, evaluation, and monitoring activities.

In this vein, PACs are active as major or co-equal decision-makers, as "watch dogs" for Title I programs at the school level, and in some instances, in personnel selection. Of the three general approaches observed, this kind of participation is the least likely to be found. Again, in the larger cities, there is a greater tendency to see examples of this particular model. In rare instances, PAC impact was significant enough to have potentially counterproductive impacts such as when one PAC helped insure that teacher aide positions go to PAC members or friends of members. For the great bulk of districts visited, however, the nature of PAC impact never approached the point of significant positive or negative ramifications.

In one of the districts our case study report provides the contrasting views of four different individuals with respect to the role and function of PACs and PAC members:

(1) "There is somewhat of a conflict regarding roles and functions between the district and school advisory councils. To what degree does their responsibility overlap?" (Principal)

(2) "Regulations place too much emphasis on teaching parents to become involved in 'school district organization and administration.' Real emphasis should be one teaching parents to encourage children at home." (Teacher)

(3) "Too much emphasis on 'teaching black parents on how to teach their black children.' Puts too much of a burden on parents. We need to teach parents to be good monitors and change agents." (Principal)

(4) "PAC guidelines tend to put parents in a power play position rather than 'exclusively in an instructional type of involvement.' PACs are too involved in just writing the parent component of a school plan." (Compensatory Education Administrator)

These ascribed role variations are reminiscent of the Sterns-Peterson typology: placation; sanction; information; checks and balances; and change-agent roles.*

*Marian Sterns and Susan Peterson, "Parent Involvement in Compensatory Education Programs: Definitions and Findings," Stanford Research Institute: Educational Policy Center, March 1973.

Summary (of Problems in Parental Participation)

There is certainly great variation among the LEAs and schools included in this study regarding the extent of parent involvement. Measured on a district-by-district basis, effective parent involvement would seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Problems of educator apathy and lack of commitment, limited PAC role conceptions, inadequate communications and training activities, and problematic membership policies all contributed to this situation in most of the districts visited in this study. But because participation is high and substantive in some of the largest and most dynamic cities, there may be both more extensive and more effective participation in large cities than a simply statistical comparison would suggest.

Few examples of a major positive state impact on the nature of local parental activity could be cited from our case studies. Conditions in the local setting, particularly the commitment of professional educators to sharing power with parents, seem to be the currently critical determinants of effective parent participation.

Some of the supporters of the legislation that created ESEA hoped that strong and active PACs would complement the basically top-down administrative orientation of the usual enforcement procedures. Parents would, in effect, serve as "on the spot" monitors of LEA implementation of the requirements. It is not at all clear from this study whether that hope has been realized, even in those districts and schools where participation is high and parents are influential. While greater conformity to the Title I requirements may well be associated with influential parent participation, the "threat of a locally based monitor" may not be the reason. Commitment to parent participation may be just one more example of a local intent to fully implement the program requirements. Or a commitment to fully inform parents may have the important side effect of more fully informing professional educators about the nature of the requirements--perhaps the "teachers" learn along with the "pupils." Our field teams did not come across any situations in which a local PAC had "caught" LEA officials in a violation of the requirements. On the other hand, the parochial interests of some parent groups may not always be completely consistent with the intent of the legislation. For example, many parents feel as strongly as many educators do about providing services to educationally deprived pupils who want to learn and have a high potential to learn, rather than to some of those who may technically be "most in need." Indeed, in some cases the program requirements have protected the integrity of Title I from parent groups just as they have from educators.

C. Some Illustrations of Effective and Successful Parent Participation Policies, Programs, Practices and Strategies

There is certainly great variation among the 32 LEAs and 116 schools included in this study regarding the extent of parent involvement. Measured on a district-by-district basis, effective parent involvement would seem to be the exception rather than the rule. As we discribed in the previous section, problems of educator apathy and lack of commitment, limited PAC role conceptions, inadequate communications and training activities, and problematic membership policies all contributed to this situation in most of the districts visited in this study. However, we will now turn our attention to those examples where parent participation in ESEA, Title I programs seemed to be working. We will analyze those state and local policies, practices, programs and strategies that, in our view, contributed to positive outcomes in this required (ESEA, Title I) program area. Our discussion will be framed around the four problem areas of parent involvement noted above:

(a) Educator apathy and lack of commitment,

(b) Membership and recruitment,

(c) Training of PAC members, and

(d) Patterns of role and function of PACs.

Our analysis will also need to examine the issue of parent participation at two levels: (1) district-wide PACs, and (2) school building PACs.

C.1 Educator Apathy and Lack of Commitment to Parent Participation

Our cases provide illustrations of several strategies for ameliorating the prevalant "attitude of coolness" that educators and educational institutions have projected toward the issue of parent participation in educational decision-making processes. One of the most effective antidotes for combating educator apathy identified in our study was a long-standing and serious commitment by policy makers and administrators at both the state and local levels to the importance of contact between the school and the home. In four of the eight states in our data set there was evidence that the state had acknowledged parent involvement as an important Title I program

area. In two states this took the form of SEA leadership in creating a state-level Title I Parent Advisory Council, while two other states demonstrated their commitment by mandating PACs as a program requirement for participation in the state compensatory education program (SCEP).

State-level PACs proved to be an exemplary forum by which two SEAs provided leadership and encouragement to LEAs in the development of Title I parent advisory groups at the school district-level. This mechanism also served as the primary vehicle for providing parental input in the formulation of state Title I policy in these two states. In one state, which had established its state PAC in the mid-1960's, much in advance of federal attention to the issue of parental involvement, an activist SEA Title I unit encouraged local directors to bring Title I parent representives to all state level meetings. This state also provided at an early date for non-public representation, both professional and lay, at state Title I functions. The second illustration of the positive influence exhibited by a state leader involved the commitment of one state's Title I consultant to the concept that Title I parents are "a valuable resource for school districts and not a threat to educators". This individual was singularly instrumental in the recent creation of a state-wide Title I parent advisory committee in this state. He also secured critical financial support from seventeen of twenty eligible school districts to underwrite the cost of maintaining this mechanism for parental input at the state level.

In the two other states, the importance of home-school contact was manifested by the existence of a state PAC requirement mandating that schools participating in the state compensatory education programs must establish parent advisory councils. This administrative requirement served to reinforce the importance of the concept of parent participation in education programs and it enhanced the opportunity for parental involvement in local compensatory education planning and evaluation processes. For example, while the range of both quantity and quality of parental involvement, as well as administrative attitudes about sharing authority varied widely throughout the largest LEA in one of the SCEP states, the general pattern evidenced during our field visits was one in which there existed the expectations on the part of the school officials that Title I parents had a legitimate role to play in the school district's decision-making processes about Title I programs.

The presence of legal and administrative requirements for parental

involvement at the school level were found to be of little importance unless they were supported by effective control mechanisms, such as SEA and/or LEA site monitoring activities. In only one of three states that emphasized monitoring of parent participation requirements in their Title I application form, did we find evidence where state or local Title I officials did conduct effective compliance reviews of parent involvement at the school level. It does appear, however, that on-site compliance monitoring reviews, when they were implemented in the one state in question, did provide an incentive for increased attention by school-level administrators to the issue of parent participation in Title I programs.

Earlier we noted that our eight state analysis indicated that Title I parents generally are in need of "radically different resources" than those which SEAs and LEAs seemed prepared to offer them. One unique approach to ensuring the viability of parent participation in Title I programs involved one large urban LEA's creation of an independent urban affairs office, which reported directly to the Superindentant of Schools. This unit which was primarily responsible for providing information and assistance to both district and school Parent Advisory Councils, served as the Superintendent's special pipeline to the minority communities. The strategy of delegating the technical assistance functions to a unit other than the district's Title I office was instrumental in fostering a healthy competition within the local education bureaucracy with respect to the needs of Title I PACs and parents, and this mechanism generally served the best interest of Title I parents in this school district.

C.2 Membership and Recruitment

Our research indicates that school districts stand in dire need of good ideas on how parents might be more actively involved in education processes, both at the district and school levels. Since membership and recruitment problems for Title I were found to be most problematic at the school-building level, we will focus our comments generally on identified exemplary school-level PAC activity.

The level of parental involvement seems to be closely related to the frequency of the interaction between the school and the home. Simply stated, our experience across the 32 LEAs indicates that more direct contact, such as telephone calls and home visits with parents, are usually necessary

to stimulate parental involvement in Title I programs. Some examples of innovative approaches to developing more viable home/school linkages were: one medium-sized LEA was able to secure time on a local television station to promote increased parental participation; another district placed PAC advertisements and announcements in local newspapers; and a successful strategy implemented in a medium-sized LEA was to schedule all school-level PAC meetings after programs involving Title I children.

Exemplary practices were found in one of our eight rural LEAs. This school district requires the Title I teacher to visit the home of each pupil twice annually. In addition, Title I paraprofessionals were designated as home/school coordinators and were responsible for keeping parents informed about both Title I program activities and their individual child's progress. These activities helped to foster a solid basis for support and contact between the Title I program and this rural community. Given this high level of commitment and interaction with its Title I constituents, it is not surprising that the district has received a high response rate from its mail surveys of Title I parents which seek to solicit parent availablity for service on PACs and their willingness to nominate others for service on district and school level PAC.

Our cases also provide insights about the difficult issues of desegregation and parent involvement in Title I programs. One interesting strategy for responding to the needs of parents in a desegregation context is the development of supplemental neighborhood reading centers (under Title I support) at the housing projects where large numbers of minority children lived. One urban LEA implemented this plan in order to provide minority parents with the opportunity of greater parental input into the Title I program given the proximity and visibility of the reading center programs. Moreover, school district officials hoped that this program would revitalize parent involvement in the Title I program by getting the Title I reading specialists involved in PAC meetings at the site, through parent conferences and by attracting the involvement of Title I parents and volunteers in the after-school reading programs in their neighborhood.

Our data clearly demonstrates the need for clear state guidelines regarding membership and recruitment policies with respect to parent participation in Title I programs. First, an essential policy for ensuring a minimum level of administrative integrity is the requirement that the name of the individual members on the district-level and school-level councils be included in the LEA

Title I proposal. It is not enough that these lists be maintained at each school building site. One state provides a model approach with respect to membership and recruitment. The state guidelines are very specific and descriptive with respect to the recruitment and identification of the types of individuals for participation on both the district and school-building parent advisory councils.

> The state requires that a majority of the voting membership be parents (not employed by the district) of students eligible for categorical services. The SEA requires that the district PAC be composed of each of the following types of individuals: (a) parents who reflect the ethnic and socio-economic composition of the district; (b) representatives from non-school community social service agencies, as well as from the business community; (c) classified aides; (d) teachers and administrators; and (e) representatives of non-public schools. Provisions for parent participation at the school building level, in the school PACs, parallel the district-level requirements.
>
> Both the district and school-level Title I application forms provide guarantees for parent involvement: (a) a listing of district PAC members and their assigned representativeness (parent of participating students, district employee, or school PAC member) (b) designation of the amount budgeted for activities of the district PAC; and (c) provision for the signature of the district PAC chairperson.

Moreover, the site visit checklists and procedures used by this state's SEA to monitor school-level compliance indicate that extensive attention is paid to the area of parent involvement. For example, at the school level, the program quality checklist deals specifically with such questions as: (under activities related to developing the school-level plan) "To what degree did the participants represent the various points of view in the school and community?"; and (under activities related to gaining community interest and enlisting participation) "How well do activities engage and maintain parent and community interest?" Other areas of parent participation/community involvement probed during the school site visits are: representation of parents and community at regular district PAC meetings; involvement of PAC in on-going planning and modification of the program; regular involvement of parents in classroom, support and program evaluation activities; and utilizing parents, community members and other volunteers in instructional and in enrichment areas of the school's program. There is also special attention paid Title I-type concerns, such as "Are more than a majority of participating members on the district PAC parents (not employed by the school district) of participating educationally disadvantaged students?'

A second policy that seems essential to strong parental oversight is the provision by the state and/or local Title I administrations for the reimbursement of parents for after-school activities. While very few school districts reimbursed parents for Title I related activities, one large urban LEA compensated parents for expenses incurred in attending the monthly district PAC meeting, as well as for mileage to and from homes to meetings, child care supervicion (when applicable), and lunch expenses, in those rare instances when meetings extend beyond 2:00 p.m.

A number of frustrated parents interviewed in our study offered the recommendation that if the integrity and viability of the parent participation component of Title I is to be maintained, it will be necessary that a special position of "parent coordinator" needs to be established and funded at the state and district levels in order to sustain parent supervision or oversight of compensatory education programs.

C.3 Training of PAC Members

Typically, SEAs and LEAs demonstrated an extremely low level of information communication to parents with respect Title I program requirements and parent involvement responsibilities, e.g., the potential roles of the PAC. However, there were important exceptions to this typical pattern. We have identified several successful practices for disseminating information to parents concerning Title I programs and regulations and for providing inservice and/or preservice to Title I parents about the role of PACs. These include: (a) conducting inservice workshop and conferences; (b) establishing a state advisory committee of Title I parents; and (c) ensuring parent attendance at regional and national conferences.

Some states conduct technical assistance activity for district PAC members and LEA Title I staff. SEAs generally provide material resource assistance and special services to local PACs, but only in a few cases did the SEA activity address such important items as: a handbook for PAC members, or guidance on how to conduct special surveys of PAC needs. Potentially valuable strategies included the following activities: a clearing house/ informational network; and the development of video tape and other audio visual materials for use with Title I parents that effectively present Title I regulations and interpretations. Of key importance was the treatment of major concepts and ideas relative to parent participation in local Title I needs assessment and evaluation activities.

In only one state did we find sufficient evidence that parent involvement and technical assistance to district PACs had been a key objective of the SEA Title I administration, and both SEA materials and training experiences have had some effect in stimulating parent participation at the local level. For example, the SEA has sponsored a series of diverse activities, such as conducting statewide workshops for Title I parent groups, providing technical assistance to individual LEA PACs and supporting the district's sending parents to the state regional and national conventions.

The existance of state PACs in three of the eight sample states has proven to be an effective source of state technical assistance to Title I parents. An active state PAC can provide exemplary leadership and encouragement to Title I parent groups at the district level. This mechanism also offers local parent representatives an opportunity: (a) to meet their counterparts from other LEAs; (b) to develop an important support system where the more experienced and active parent representatives provide leadership and guidance to the newer members; and (c) to share experiences and strategies for mobilizing parent participation in Title I decision making processes. For example, regular attendance at state PAC meetings provided a new PAC chairperson of a middle-size school district with self confidence and sufficient knowledge of Title I regulations to challenge a local school board's decision to drop Title I due to the fiscal mismanagement of this program by school district officials. Over the course of several months this parent mobilized sufficient community interest in the problem-filled Title I program that the local board of education reversed its decision to discontinue compensatory education programs. Subsequently, the board approved a Title I reorganization plan whose design closely followed the program recommendations of this concerned parent.

Only a few states permit LEAs to use Title I funds for district training activities (i.e., workshops), outside consultants, travel and parent meeting expenses. And in all but one state, budget for school-level PAC activities generally did not exist. One exemplary program of parent training activities at the local level was observed in the largest LEA that we visited in our study. The district PAC sponsored and funded a series of key parent training activities, including : an annual workshop to assess Title I program needs and to make recommendations regarding the district's compensatory education needs, goals and priorities; mini-in-services to provide basic and advanced information to new and older PAC members; leadership workshops for newly-elected and potential PAC officers; semi-annual or annual joint

comprehensive service education conferences for district PAC members, their alternates, principles and school PAC chairpersons; and travel for a limited number of parent members from the district PAC to attend relevant out-of-town conferences such as the National Coalition of Title I Parents and the state association of compensatory educators.

One indictor of state or district commitment to parents' training was the provision of funds so that state and local representatives could attend national conferences of Title I parents each year. Our cases provided numerous illustrations of how attendance at national meetings contributed to the mobilization of parent interest and provided a level of information about Title I regulations and programs that was not available through other mechanisms. For example, we found evidence in two LEAs that only because their district PAC representatives had secured copies of the new federal Title I regulations at a National Coalition of Title I Parents conference did state and local Title I officials agree to provide copies of the new regulations to local PACs. Thus, these external contacts turn out to be key sources of information for parents about Title I programs and regulations. A recommendation that warrants consideration in a number of states and LEAs involves the implementation of a citizen training model whereby an "outside agency" (non-school agency) is awarded a certain percentage of the district's Title I allocation for the express purpose of providing parent training and inservice.

Another mechanism used at the district and school level to provide technical assistance to parents, as well as to serve as a school-home contact was the school/community worker (or community services coordinator, parent involvement specialist, parent-coordinator). Generally, the school/community identification is a relatively inexpensive support service activity to which schools might consider subscription. It provides for a full-or-half-time school/community worker (usually a neighborhood parent) to provide liaison between the school and the home and to keep teachers well-informed of the special needs of Title I students. One state Title I unit hired a Title I parent who had extensive experience as a district PAC member in the largest LEA to provide technical assistance to state and local PACs through workshops and presentations. This individual has been identified as a major change agent and trouble shooter within the state with respect to parent involvement.

Our data provide several prominent examples of the positive impact that external forces have had on the development of citizen training in the area of advocacy and leadership with respect to parent involvement. Many activist

Title I parents had received special "participation training" through their earlier involvement in other federal programs. For example, Model Cities, Community Action Programs and Project TREND had provided for parent advisory councils and gave minority parents a thorough training in "who's who", how to set up information networks, and how to develop action strategies.

And finally, in one state, not only was parent involvement defined as one of eight required components of a Title I program that each school had to address in its planning and evaluation activities, but also the SEA had developed procedures for monitoring school activities in this program area.

C.4 Pattern of Role and Function of Parent Advisory Councils

Our studies generally confirm the widely held view that the main thrust of parent involvement in Title I is to support the policies established by district officials and to legitimate current project efforts, rather than to engage in substantive planning, monitoring or evaluation of a district's Title I program. Nonetheless, there were notable exceptions found in our data:

- In one middle-sized rural LEA, the district PAC was involved in designing and conducting the annual Title I needs assessments survey. This parent group did have direct input into the design of the Title I program and did review the district Title I application.

- One urban district PAC has taken a unique and active role in Title I evaluation. In 1973, a Parent Advisory Committee evaluation team, made up of the members of the district PAC, was involved in a rigorous six-month training program conducted by an outside consultant agency. Each year the PAC evaluation team visits selected schools that house one of the major projects. The district has been so pleased with the team's efforts and their contributions to Title I's operation that it has requested that the SEA credential the district evaluation team members. The Title I administrator, who supported this parent initiative, has described this involvement as landmark in the nation:

  > "Where regulations have talked about involvement, the response has generally been interpreted to mean only advice and consent. However, now this advice can be based on fact and on information which the parents themselves have collected without fear of these data being co-opted or prejudiced by the constaints of the system."

- In the early 1970's a large urban state in our data pool adopted state regulations that provided a firm legal basis for comprehensive parent involvement in a broad spectrum of Title I program responsibilities, notably: planning, evaluation and implementation of Title I services. In its largest LEA, the influence of parents on the administration of the compensatory education programs was observed to be one of the most dominant characteristics of the Title I program.

- One large urban district's experience with parent involvement is captured in the comments of a high-level official regarding the tensions inherent in the administration and implementation of an aggressive approach to parent involvement at the local level:

> "We in the school district made a classic mistake. In the 1960's we took parents everywhere we (Title I school district officials) went. We tried to play "one-upmanship" with the state and other school districts. We brought parents and had them participate in our presentations on the district's compensatory education program at state board meetings, conferences, and at other forums. This was a reward for parents for their involvement and activities. However, parents became so sophisticated concerning (Title I) issues, and they learned that in addressing these (compensatory education) issues at the state board level they often found a more receptive audience than at the local level where local school boards tended to rely on the judgements of local school administrators. Thus we politicized, for better or for worse, our compensatory education parents.

Where PACs have had impact at the district level, it has tended to be in a reactive mode. For example:

- One district PAC lobbied the local school board to modify the Title I director's recommendation to delete a "favored offering" of the district parent group.

- In another state two district PACs have played a major "watch dog", role. Another example of parental impact on Title I policy making is as follows:

> In FY 1977 there emerged a dispute over wheter local-level program or non-school and special projects, such as a pre-kindergarten program and administrative support services would be cut back due to the district's budget deficit. The district PAC committee members unanimously favored protecting Title I projects in participating schools and they took their concerns over the head of the Assistant Superintendent for Compensatory Education, directly to members of the local School Board and to the local Superintendent. The outcome resulted in all participating Title I schools being funded in FY 1977, while administrative support services were cut from $1.5 million, and two special projects, outdoor education and the district's pre-kindergarten program, were drastically reduced and scheduled to be gradually phased out. However, for FY 1978, the district's Compensatory Education Planning Committee, a group made up largely of parents, recommended that the six elementary schools that had been kept in the Title I program on waivers from the state (because they had fallen in the numerical order on the needs ranking) be eliminated and replaced by schools with greater need.

As we noted earlier, there is one notable example among our 32 cases of a district PAC taking a pro-active stand. A district PAC chairperson in a medium-sized district apparently "saved" her community's Title I program by mobilizing parental support for a parent-initiated redesign of the compensatory education program offerings and by convincing a hostile school board of the new program's importance.

While the extent of parent involvement seems generally to be far more dependent on the commitment of local Title I staff and the particular conditions in each district, one state did establish in its state guidelines a definition of parent involvement as it applies to the planning, implementation and evaluation of Title I programs. This is in stark contrast to the lack of specificity in the federal regulations with respect to the role and scope of responsibility that parents should be involved in.

- At the district level, PACs have responsibility for developing the comprehensive district plan; making a district needs assessment; establishing district goals nad objectives; and setting the order in which schools will enter the compensatory program.

- Three areas of the school-level consolidated plans deal with parent involvement. First, a set of assurances are listed which specify certain types of parent involvement at the school level, most notably, review of the plan and involvement in planning, implementation and evaluation of the program at the school level. The SAC chairperson must sign the school application form indicating that the assurances have been met. A second area of parent participation involves a self-reporting of participation by school members in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. One page of the school-level application identifies the representativeness of each PAC person, e.g., parent, aide, teacher, etc., and their specific area of involvement, i.e., assistant in needs assessment, in budget preparation, etc. The final area concerning parent involvement covered in the school-level plan is dissemination of evaluation which must be reported to six specified groups (parents and community, school PAC, district PAC, the district office, the governing board, and the SEA) in "the language most appropriate to their understanding."

And once again, only one state provides for the essential elements of a monitoring system which, when carried out, would ensure compliance to the established state policies. For example, the site visit check list used by the SEA staff to monitor school-level practices deals specifically with such questions as: "How well do activities engage and maintain parent and community interest?"; and "How well do processes ensure delivery of information to and feedback from parents and community?". In addition, in an open "exit meeting" conducted upon the completion of the school site visit, the SEA field consultant shares

the team's findings with the principal and parent representatives who have been involved in the school review.

In summary, the key provisions contained in this state's consolidated regulations pertaining to parent involvement are:

(1) District and school-level councils must participate in establishing objectives and in the planning, implementation and evaluation of programs;

(2) With respect to evaluation, school districts must report to PACs the evaluation results, which must include, at a minimum: "(a) the extent to which objectives were met; (b) the extent to which proposed activities were implemented; and (c) the extent to which students in programs demonstrated progress in academic skills";

(3) The majority of members are not employed by the district;

(4) The district PAC acts as a hearing board for any individual or group that may want to propose additions to or changes in the school district's compensatory education project;

(5) Cost for in-service training for members of the district and school PACs are a legitimate expense of Title I funds, and provision for such training should be included in the project budget; and

(6) Certification of parent participation in the specified activity areas is required by the PAC chairperson.

Our field work also uncovered two prominent alternative models for parent participation that seemed to offer more liberated role conceptions for parent involvement in educational decision-making processes. The first example involves the definition of parent participation provided under the Indian Education Act, which grants are made directly to the respective Indian Nation. While the LEA manages the IEA programs for the Nation, the parent committee has final authority over personnel, including hiring and firing decisions. This is in direct contrast to the operation of the Title I program where school officials have not shared such authority with parents, and, indeed, it is not required under Title I regulations. Similarly, under the federal Follow-Through* program guidelines, parent representatives again serve on the personnel review committee that evaluate applicants for Follow-Through positions. Follow-Through parents also serve as home aides and classroom volunteers, rather than confining themselves solely to committee meetings, which have been the major Title I parental role observed across our 32 cases.

*Follow-Through is a federal program that supports educational programs in grades 1-3 for a select group of children who have completed federal Head Start Programs.

D. Proposed Changes in Policy and Practice

Our study indicates a considerable shortcoming on the part of SEAs with respect to their willingness, capability, and expertise in assistaing LEAs with parental involvement. For the most part, there appears to be either a reluctance or a casualness characterizing the administrative approach of SEAs to this compliance area. This is clearly indicated by problems at the local district level. While there are some notable successes, most LEAs give this requirement short shrift or only a nodding acknowledgement. Attention to and understanding of administrative responsibilities in the area of parent involvement was minimal in most of the school districts visited. We therefore recommend that SEAs, with considerably greater assistance from USOE, should intensify their present level of effort to attain compliance by LEAs with respect to the parent involvement requirements.

The following specific types of activities appear in order:

(1) USOE should develop alternative models and sample materials, appropriate for different sizes and types of LEAs, for use by SEAs with their LEAs.

(2) USOE should develop a technical assistance program to demonstrate and train SEA-level staff in various methods, approaches, and models that LEAs can utilize in meeting this requirement.

(3) USOE should monitor SEAs regarding this requirement regularly and thoroughly, employing consistent criteria of adequacy.

(4) SEAs should be encouraged to provide technical assistance for LEAs such that parents of Title I pupils can become both more knowledgeable and skilled in pertinent Title I parent involvement activities. Such assistance should primarily take the form of training activities and materials and should probably include parents as both trainees and instructors.

(5) SEAs should be encouraged to include in their administrative budgets an annual allocation for staff, materials and programs to enhance the parent involvement component at the LEA level.

(6) SEAs should encourage LEA budgetary set-asides for parental involvement activities, particularly in the area of parent activity coordination and support, specially developed materials, and training workshops for parents.

(7) At the USOE and SEA levels, guidelines, regulations and supportive materials provided to parents should be carefully prepared so that the variety of special needs of Title I parents are satisfactorily addressed.

(8) States and districts should be encouraged to work together in developing "due process" safeguards for Parent Advisory Councils.

(9) The manner in which LEAs will meet the parent involvement requirement should be carefully and thoroughly delineated in the districts' Title I applications to the SEA. This part of the proposal, as a minimum, should be reviewed by the district Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and countersigned by a district PAC officer. District Title I parents should also have participated in the development of at least this section of the proposal, and it should be readily available to all parents who request it.

(10) When Title I programs are monitored, both SEAs and LEAs should include interviews with Title I parents and PAC members to ascertain the extent and quality of parent involvement that exists in LEAs and schools, respectively.

Recently, we have become aware of a thrust on the part of OBPE (the Office of Budgeting, Planning and Evaluation) that currently supports a national technical assistance effort for states and local school districts in the area of evaluation of ESEA, Title I programs. Ten technical assistance centers (TACs), one per HEW region, are currently funded at approximately $5 million for 1977-78 for this purpose. We would contend that such an approach (states and LEAs participate on an optional basis) makes eminently good sense and we suggest that a similar federal thrust be mounted in the largely neglected area of ESEA, Title I parental involvement.

These recommendations would entail a major adjustment in the time spent by SEAs in meeting this requirement. The SEAs' technical assistance activities would have to be extended to include dissemination, in-service training, and on-site consultation in this area. LEAs would also have to take major steps to plan for and facilitate improved parent participation at the district and school levels. There is a possibility that some school administrators would continue to react negatively and defensively and attempt to offset such a thrust. In the rural states, in the smaller rural districts of all the states, and at the school level, much attention to assisting administrators in transforming these recommendations into practice will be required. Not only would more time be required, but additional funds for this purpose will be needed as well. Since this involves an attitudinal change as much as anything else, special care would have to be exercised in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of the suggested practices and activities in the early years following their commencement.

E. Opportunity for Additional Research

Our comparative case study of the administration of Title I in eight states and 32 school districts leaves a number of important research questions about parent participation as yet unanswered.

(1) There is a need for an extensive investigation of other federal programs requiring parent participation to determine whether they evidence the same common administrative problems. For example, has the Follow-Through parent participation model, in fact, achieved a greater level of parent involvement, and if so, why?

(2) The federal government might wish to consider conducting follow-up studies of those sites (i.e., LEAs) where successful parent participation practices were identified so that a better understanding can be gained regarding the critical factors associated with these processes.

(3) A major question that emerges from our case study analysis focuses upon whether it is better to merge or consolidate the parent participation components of several federal programs at a school site, or to preserve the separate parent advisory committees? It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up survey to assess how parents, principals, teachers and program administrators feel about the strengths and draw-backs of the traditional independent advocacy model in contrast to the consolidated approach of program management at the school site level.

(4) A major tension that we observed in several large urban LEAs was to balance the need for stability and expertise in parent leadership against representativeness and openness. The tendency of a small clique of parents to insulate themselves once they have achieved power on the district PAC, and to isolate the larger collective of parents from participating in key program decisions needs to be studied. How often does this phenomenon occur? What would be the consequence of requiring a rotating leadership system? Are there strategies for encouraging shared decision making that will not be dysfunctional to the development of parent participation in decision-making for compensatory education programs?

(5) A major flaw in federal approaches to parent involvement centers around the lack of provision for support and technical assistance to parent constituencies. Additional research is needed on what types of in-service are most beneficial to parental needs.

(6) A need for improved and more in-service training has been cited but it is not clear, if effective in-service training is to be provided, who should perform this function and how it should be conducted. Most of the efforts, heretofore, have emulated either the academic or adult education models. Are there others? What are their strengths and what are their limitations?

(7) In states where there is a state-level PAC, are district and school level PACs' functioning noticeably improved?

(8) In those instances where educators have indicated a desire and willingness to achieve an effective parent involvement component, what are the specific technical assistance needs of this group in order for them to be more facilitative and supportive?

(9) What impact can be anticipated when effective parental involvement, along the lines of the ESEA, Title I/PAC model, is attained? Do significant differences emerge in program content, operation, staffing, scope, evaluation, compliance with federal regulations and/or pupil performance?

NOTE: The study referred to in this paper and the specific examples cited are documented in eight case studies and a synthesis report prepared by the authors and their colleagues at Syracuse Research Corporation, Syracuse, New York under contract with NIE. The Synthesis Report is available from SRC as follows:

Volume S: Synthesis Report--A Comparative Analysis of ESEA, Title I in Eight States, Principal authors, Robert J. Goettel, Bernard A. Kaplan and Martin E. Orland with the assistance of Pascal D. Forgione, Jr. and Sheila M. Huff. Length and price: 250 pages, $17.00. Order #TR-77-564S.

Listed price includes tax, handling and mailing (book rate). All checks and money orders should be made payable to Syracuse Research Corporation. Address: Office of Education Publications, Syracuse Research Corporation, Merrill Lane, Syracuse, New York 13210.

The eight case studies are as yet not available.